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Response Paper on *Beloved*

Sethe, Paul D and the other slaves are treated like animals because their slave owner refuses to treat them as an equal species. Their slave owners prefer to treat the slaves like another species that is not human, preferably a species of farm animal. Paul D has had a bit in his mouth, the male slaves have been having sex with the cows, and even Sethe tried to murder all of her children. Since the slave owner is treating his slaves like animals, his slaves are acting more and more like animals every day. In this case, Sethe is acting the most animalistic. She attempts to murder her children in order to protect them from the hardships of being a slave in their upcoming future. This is something an animal would do; most species of wild animals kill the runt of the litter in order to save them from the suffering they will face in their future. Since the slave owner is treating his slaves like animals, that is all the slaves begin to know, and consequently the slaves start acting more and more like animals every day without even realizing it.

Infanticide is very common in polytocous animals. Polytocous animals are animals that have multiple births; like pigs, dogs, and cats. When a polytocous animal gives birth, there is always going to be an offspring that is smaller than the others, the runt of the litter. The runt will always be weak and struggle for survival for the rest of its life, that is why the mother commits infanticide. For instance, in pigs when the piglets are nursing, the teet that each piglet suckles on from the beginning (straight out of the womb) is the teet that they suckle on for life. They can’t change teets. In pigs the dorsal teets have less nutrients, therefore the piglet that unfortunately gets stuck suckling on the dorsal teet is going to be less healthy and most likely be the runt of the litter. Pigs do not actually kill the runt of the litter, the farmer normally does that for them like in the movie *Babe.* Although pigs do not physically commit infanticide, many other wild species do; cats and wild dogs like wolves to name a few. Sethe is showing animalistic behavior when she attempts to murder all of her offspring in order to save them from the hardships of slavery. She has good intentions, but she is not thinking like a human. Even Paul D says, “You got two feet Sethe, not four” (194) implying that he even realized that she was acting like an animal in the barn that day. Since she has been treated like an animal for so long, she has begun to think and act like an animal herself. The novel has even used animal-like words to describe Sethe’s actions, “She just flew” and “The hummingbird wings beat on” (192) when describing her actions after what she had done in the barn. Since she was raised as an animal, therefore she acts as an animal.